

Spassa pensiero

ENSEMBLE

*Nelle bocche di gentaglia*¹

ENG

Ribebba, arbebo, zanforgna, tintine, crembalum and all the others

The mood while planning and creating this album was one of excitement—we felt like we were making history, though proudly with a lowercase h!

The jew's harp, a small yet remarkable instrument with an ancient legacy and a highly complex ethnomusical background, finally gains its rightful place as the focus of an album entirely dedicated to the repertoire of northern Italy (and beyond, as we shall see).

Northern Italy has a deep-rooted connection with the jew's harp. However, following its disappearance in the immediate postwar period, attention understandably shifted toward the still-thriving traditions of the South and the islands—particularly in Sicily, Campania, Sardinia, Calabria, Puglia, and Basilicata. Nevertheless, in the 1970s, important evidence of the instrument's presence was rediscovered in the Occitan valleys of Piedmont, though these findings remain largely unknown.

Despite its relative obscurity in modern times, the jew's harp has left a significant mark on historical records in northern Italy. Its musical role and production are referenced in a diverse range of documents, from legal proceedings and travel accounts to statistical reports, notarial contracts, and newspaper articles. The earliest known written records of the instrument's presence in Italy date back to the second half of the 15th century—both originating from the North. These documents describe large-scale production and most of all distribution, with the mention of the presence of five dozen jew's harps in a Milanese shop in 1467 and ten dozen in a Trieste shop in 1495. Archaeological evidence further supports the widespread presence of the instrument in northern Italy since at least the 14th century, particularly through excavations of fortresses and their surrounding areas, though jew's harp findings from Italian sites remain scarce. However, the instrument's near-total absence in the archaeological record of southern Italy and the islands may not reflect a true historical absence but rather the misidentification of artifacts and a general lack of interest in medieval and early modern periods.

When it comes to the jew's harp production, northern Italy has always held a privileged position thanks to its manufacturing centers. The most notable hub was located in the Sesia Valley in eastern Piedmont, where, between the 15th and late 19th centuries, craftsmen produced jew's harps in remarkable quantities. These instruments entered an already globalized trade network, reaching markets through key trading points in Milan, Genoa, and the Alpine passes of Aosta Valley and Switzerland. Some 19th-century traces of jew's harp manufacturing in Valsassina, Lombardy, may suggest an influence from the later production in Valsesia and still require deeper investigation. Further east, across the border, we find what is perhaps the most important and long-standing jew's harp production center—established in the 17th century and still active today—in Molln, Upper Austria. Over the centuries, its products have undoubtedly circulated in Italy, alongside those from Valsesia.

Behind this context of semi-industrial production and affordable instruments, there may also have been individual blacksmiths and artisans who occasionally supplied a smaller, more selective clientele. However, in northern Italy, no trace of such a practice has been found (leaving open the question of whether it ever existed), whereas in southern Italy and the islands, this tradition has survived to the present day. Because of that, in these regions, the morphology of the instruments often varies significantly depending on the area and the blacksmith who made them, while still sharing some fundamental structural characteristics.

¹ This 17th-century expression from Vincenzo Giustiniani (*Discorso sopra la musica de' suoi tempi*, 1628) referring to the jew's harp, translates as "In the mouths of the rabble".

Reviving the sound

Bringing together all this historical and ethnographic material to build a coherent picture and make sense of it has been the primary goal of our research. However, the musical revival has also played a crucial role. On one hand, drawing from tradition meant relying on the (few) documented tunes known to have been played on the jew's harp. On the other, we sought to create a hypothetical repertoire by “jew's-harpizing” songs and dances, using field recordings as well as written and transcribed music collections. These choices were not made arbitrarily but were the result of experiments aimed at verifying the compatibility of these melodies with the jew's harp's harmonic range. This process was further supported by continuous comparisons with traditional uses of the instrument in other parts of Europe — Switzerland, Austria, Corsica, Galicia/Asturias, Scotland, Ireland, England, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, Lithuania, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Croatia, and Ukraine. This comparative approach, combined with an in-depth analysis of the precise contexts and repertoires of players across Europe, was essential in shaping a consistent way of interpreting and approaching the music.

For the time being, it was not possible to document certain historically attested but now rare or highly virtuosic playing techniques from Northern Italy. Written and iconographic sources show the playing of two instruments simultaneously (a practice that was once common in several parts of Europe but is now very rare), playing with one hand only, or using a large hollow container to amplify the sound. We felt that these techniques would not have been sufficiently highlighted in a studio recording, whereas in a live setting, their visual as well as sonic impact could be better appreciated.

For this project, we also chose to look beyond the familiar Piedmontese-Occitan cultural sphere. We included Lombardy, a region with an extensive yet still little-known heritage of traditional sounds, as well as Switzerland and France, two neighboring areas that have been deeply intertwined with Northern Italy for centuries through constant exchanges and mutual cultural influences. We also extended this approach chronologically, offering an equally “experimental” exploration of how the jew's harp may have contributed to early musical practices—in our case, Renaissance music. Archaeological and iconographic evidence confirms that the jew's harp had been circulating across much of Europe since the early 13th century. Given that, it must have played a significant role in a period when the boundary between “elite” and popular music (and culture) was often blurred, if not nonexistent.

Finally, our investment in this project is oriented toward the future. We find ourselves in a moment of renewed cultural and musical interest in the jew's harp, which we see as particularly promising. We hope, therefore, to leave future enthusiasts and musicians with a record of what the instrument is capable of, what kinds of repertoires can be integrated, and how they might be approached.

“A lie as big as a house”, or, a small disclaimer

We wanted to enrich our musical exploration with an artistic approach, incorporating minimalist arrangements, rhythmic-percussive accompaniment, and bass jew’s harps. In particular, we were delighted to include in our ensemble other instruments often unjustly labeled as “minor,” such as spoons and rhythm bones, which—like the jew’s harp—have a surprisingly rich history and complexity. The same goes for frame drums, which, despite their overlooked yet significant history in Northern Italy, are still in use today in places like Cogne (Aosta Valley) and some areas of Istria (now part of Croatia).

The combination of jew’s harp and percussion led us, in the recording and mixing process, to significantly increase the volume of the melody produced by the jew’s harp. We want to be upfront about this deliberate choice, which we jokingly called “a lie as big as a house”: this artistic decision intentionally alters the instrument’s natural acoustic and volume properties. If we examine historical and ethnographic documentation, such a balance of sounds and volumes is rarely found in traditional European practice, where the jew’s harp is typically played solo and preferably indoors. A notable exception appears to be in Campania, where the “tromma degli zingari” is sometimes included in ensembles accompanying drum songs.

While the choices we made may not be strictly “philological” in the conventional sense, they reflect our personal and contemporary way of interpreting the instrument—an approach that would be impossible, as well as unnecessary and even counterproductive, to suppress. At the same time, we remain respectful and mindful of traditional practices.

All that’s left is to wish you an enjoyable listening experience!

Suite della Val Varaita: Lou Calissoun di Pontechianale, Lou Caleisoun di Bellino, Lou Rigoudin di Juzep da' Rous, Lou Rigoudin di Miquellou

LUCA BOGGIO, LORENZO D'ERASMO, FEDERICO ROSSIGNOLI, ALESSANDRO ZOLT: JEW'S HARP

The *Calissoun/Caleisoun* is a dance found throughout the Varaita Valley, and its name is likely a reference to the *colascione*, an ancient string instrument (dances with this name can also be found elsewhere, for example, a written source from the 1930s mentions a “Calisun ballo antico” as part of the Carnival repertoire in Rocca Grimalda). Here we present two examples from the upper valley, the first from Castello hamlet of Pontechianale, and the second from the Celle hamlet of Bellino. The Rigoudin (perhaps a distortion of *Perigordino* or *Rigaudon*) is another of the many dances popular in the valley: the first comes from the repertoire of the famous fiddler *Juzep da' Rous* (Giuseppe Galliano, 1888—1980) from the Palazzo hamlet of Sampeyre, and the second from an accordion player from Frassinò, in the lower Varaita Valley.

The Varaita Valley, among the Occitan valleys of Italy, is where the most abundant evidence for jew's harp players have been collected, many of whom likely played occasionally but were still capable of making melodies recognized by the community. For this reason, we have selected these four simple dance tunes.

Notable is the memory of a female player, whose name unfortunately remains unknown, by fiddler Juzep da' Rous: he and his wife recalled a girl from the same hamlet who, with her jew's harp, was able to play along with Juzep in his repertoire. The Rigoudin we perform, with its simple and lively melody, was surely part of this musical exchange between the musicians. From Gilba, a side valley of Varaita Valley, comes Costanzo Lantermino, aka Couston 'd Mè 'd Ton (1894—1982), the only traditional jew's harp player recorded in northern Italy. Lantermino played both the jew's harp (or *arbebo* in the local Occitan dialect) and the harmonica, instruments on which he played dance tunes of which he could also sing the lyrics. We have not included his *Courenta* and *Balet* in this album, as they are quite famous in the modern folk music scene, with numerous versions already recorded by various groups, and we refer to these, starting with the most philological version performed by Daniel Craighead and Renato Galletto in the album *Muzique Ousitane 2* (1989).

Bibliography:

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Zolt, A., *Arbebo, chiribebo, champornho... La presenza dello scacciapensieri nelle Valli Occitane d'Italia*, in “Lou Temp Nouvel”, n. 69, 2020.

Discography:

VV.AA., *Muzique Ousitane*, Lou Soulestrelh, 1985.

VV.AA., *Muzique Ousitane 2*, Lou Soulestrelh, 1989.

VV.AA., *Muzique Ousitane 3*, Lou Soulestrelh, 1991.

Peron, S., Ferrero, G., *Ballo delle Valli Occitane d'Italia*, Lou Soulestrelh, 1998.

Countrodanso di Juspin Sezet e Balet di Giouann Bernardi

ALESSANDRO ZOLT: JEW'S HARP

LUCA BOGGIO: BASS JEW'S HARP (IN THE BALET)

After the simpler melodies, we present here a much more complex melody (and dance), the *Countrodanso* (which already by name refers to the *contradanza*, the country-dance, a very popular dance in the 18th century), a dance widespread especially in the middle and lower Varaita Valley. This melody comes from the repertoire of Juspin Sezet, a renowned player of the *organetto* (button accordion) from Sampeyre. The melody reached us thanks to another accordionist from Sampeyre, Giovanni (or Jouan) Bernardi (1904—1979), who, in order to learn it, literally “stole” it from Juspin by listening to him play it. As is tradition in the area, the dance is concluded with another dance, the Balet, this time from the repertoire of Jouan Bernardi, who, among other things, recalled, albeit vaguely, a man who could play the jew’s harp from his area. We like to imagine that Jouan was not the only one who “stole” the melody from Juspin...

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Discography:

Bernardi, G., *Noste Danse*, Ousitanio Vivo, 1987.

Peron, S., Ferrero, G., *Ballo delle Valli Occitane d'Italia*, Lou Soulestrelh, 1998.

La Monferrina

LORENZO D'ERASMO: JEW'S HARP

FEDERICO ROSSIGNOLI: BASS JEW'S HARP

LIONELLO MORANDI: BĚBENEK

The Monferrina is a type of dance that appeared in the early 19th century and quickly became the most fashionable dance in the bourgeois salons of Europe, before entering folk music by the mid-century, where it is still widely performed today in many regions, often with very different choreographies (Quattro Province, Caffaro Valley, Istria, Aosta Valley, Savoy, etc.). Despite the name referring to Monferrato, its origin is still uncertain.

This particular melody was, for a long time, the “Monferrina par excellence”, attested in written sources from the early 19th century (it appears in a manuscript from 1802 under the title *Alessandrina*). It recurs throughout the century (and beyond) in numerous collections of manuscript or printed dances and is also found in traditional music, often associated with nursery rhymes. For example, throughout France, it is still known today as “*Trempe ton pain, Marie*”, while at the end of the 19th century, it was published in Piedmont as “*Monferina called Checco delle Langhe*” in *Ricordi del Piemonte - Antiche Danze dal Sec. XVII al XVIII* (Turin, c. 1884). The version we play refers to the one published by guitarist and composer Mauro Giuliani in No. 11 of his *XIV balli nazionali per chitarra op. 24* (Vienna, c. 1810).

A small curiosity outside the jew’s harp context: this air was among those played by Giuseppe Antonio Palemone (Rittana 1835 — Nantes 1908), a wandering hurdy-gurdy player in the streets of Nantes, where he was known as “*Le Père Zim-Zim*”. He was one of the last documented players of this instrument, inheriting the legacy of the so-called *petits savoyards* (a term used for the boys and girls from the Western Alps and other areas of Northern Italy who traveled Europe playing for money between the 17th and 20th centuries) [from research by Rinaldo Doro].

Bibliography:

Torta, D., *Ij Brando. Musica - Musiche - Musicant*, Riva Presso Chieri, Editò, 2020.

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Monferrina piemontese “O Bundi”

ALESSANDRO ZOLT, LUCA BOGGIO: VOICE AND JEW'S HARP

VALERIO PAPA: METAL SPOONS

LIONELLO MORANDI: WOODEN CLAPPERS

This air has recently replaced the previous one as the Monferrina “par excellence” and has simultaneously become a symbol of Piedmontese folk music. The lyrics we sing and the accompanying melody were collected in the first decade of the 20th century on the hills near Turin (Cavoretto and its surroundings) by composer Leone Sinigaglia (Turin, 1868—1944) during his research on folk songs, though variants of it are already attested earlier in the valleys near Pinerolo (Filippo Seves, *Ninna-nanne filastrocche e sorteggi. Raccolti nella valle di Pinerolo*, Pinerolo, 1890) and in Monferrato (Giuseppe Ferraro, *L'altalena sarda ed il ballo: la Monferrina, in Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari*, 1893). This very simple melody, with some small variations, is well known throughout Piedmont, paired with a great variety of verses and nursery rhymes. Even today, it can still be heard as a children's song. A variant of this melody, accompanied by a playful rhyme (“*Oh Gigin Gigin bel bel*”), was also sung and played on the *arbebo* by Costanzo Lantermينو from Gilba, as mentioned in track 1.

Usually, this tune is heard performed together with the 2/4 tune that starts with “*O ciao ciao Maria Catlina*” (though there are many adapted lyrics to the same melody), but these were originally two separate dance tunes that have only recently been combined for a more orchestral performance (perhaps by Sinigaglia himself).

Bibliography:

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Grasso, G., *La Monferrina. Storia del ballo che conquistò l'Europa*, Gaggiano, Baraban, 2022.

Discography:

VV.AA., *Italian Treasury – Piemonte and Valle d'Aosta. The Alan Lomax Collection*, Rounder Select, 2004.

LYRICS

**O bundi, bundi, bundi,
'ncura na volta, 'ncura na volta.
O bundi, bundi, bundi,
'ncura na volta e peuj pa pi.
'ncura na volta sota la porta,
'ncura na vira sota la riva.
O bundi, bundi, bundi,
'ncura la volta e peuj pa pi**

Monferrina di Cogne “Salla di tre coup”

ALESSANDRO ZOLT, LUCA BOGGIO: JEW’S HARP

LORENZO D’ERASMO: JEW’S HARP AND BƏBENEK PLAYED WITH THE COGNE TECHNIQUE

VALERIO PAPA: WOODEN SPOONS

In the village of Cogne, in the Aosta Valley, an interesting and archaic repertoire of monferrine is still performed today (though this name seems to have been recently attributed to the dance, which was once simply called “cognense” or “tambourada”). This dance is performed and danced during the Carnival by the young conscripts of the village, although in ancient times it seems there were more occasions for dancing. The typical *tambour* from Cogne, a rare example of traditional frame drum in Northern Italy, accompanies this dance, alternating between the skin’s percussion, the shaking of small bells, and finally the friction of the skin with a moistened finger. We have chosen a tune that we found particularly compatible with the jew’s harps: *Salla di tre coup* (literally “the one of the three beats”), named so for the characteristic rhythmic opening executed by the percussion.

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Grasso, G., *La Monferrina. Storia del ballo che conquistò l’Europa*, Gaggiano, Baraban, 2022.

Discography:

VV.AA., *Italian Treasury – Piemonte and Valle d’Aosta. The Alan Lomax Collection*, Rounder Select, 2004.

Danse Valdôtaine “Dansa pà dessu lo fen”

ALESSANDRO ZOLT, LUCA BOGGIO: VOICE AND JEW’S HARP

VALERIO PAPA: METAL SPOONS

LORENZO D’ERASMO: FRAME DRUM WITHOUT JINGLES

The tune we perform is known over a vast area under different names or linked to various types of dances. Here we play (and sing) the version from the Aosta Valley, but its diffusion includes much of Southern and Southwestern France (where it is often danced as a *Farandole*), Spain near the Pyrenees (in Pamplona, it is the official anthem of the famous San Fermín festival), Savoy, Romandy Switzerland, the Occitan Valleys in Piedmont (where almost everyone knew it due to cultural exchanges with neighboring Provence), the Valleys near Lanzo, and other areas. Even in the violin repertoire of the Carnival in the Caffaro Valley, there is a variant of this melody (*Bas de Tach*). Regarding the Occitan valleys, this tune, adapted as a *courento*, was also played by the previously mentioned fiddler Juzep da Rous (who knows, it may have been one of the dances performed with the anonymous jew’s harp player).

In general, in the Aosta Valley, the jew’s harp has always been present due to the proximity to Valsesia production and because one of its trade routes passed through the Aosta Valley’s mountain passes. Moreover, some travel accounts (see the first two titles in the bibliography) mention that by the end of the 19th century, members (Ange and Antoine) of the famous Maquignaz alpine guides from Valtournenche were skilled jew’s harp players, making the mountaineers dance and attracting the attention of the bourgeois climbers accompanying them.

Bibliography:

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Pignet, A., Vuillermoz, L., Willien, R., *Valdoten, tzanten!*, Torino, Stamperia Musicale Fratelli Amprimo, 1957.

Discography:

VV.AA., *Italian Treasury – Piemonte and Valle d'Aosta. The Alan Lomax Collection*, Rounder Select, 2004.

VV.AA., *Valle d'Aosta. Gimillan di Cogne. Canti, suoni e filastrocche*, Nota, 2007.

LYRICS

**Dansa pà dessu lo fen,
Papa rogne, papa rogne,
Dansa pà dessu lo fen,
papa rogne, mama dit ren**

Mazurka di Martinengo

LUCA BOGGIO: JEW'S HARP

LORENZO D'ERASMO: CAMPANINE (XYLOPHONE WITH GLASS KEYBOARD)

From the Bergamo and Brescia area, we have selected some of the most recent dances from our album, the so-called “liscio”, which became popular in Europe from the 19th century, with more modern choreographies and dances appreciated for being “linked-partners” dances (polka, mazurka, schottische, waltz). There is no precise information regarding jew's harp players in this Lombard area (except for the unfortunately vague mention of a blind beggar jew's harp player in Brescia from an article titled “Ciechi meccanici e suonatori”, published in 1857 in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano* by an anonymous P.), but the instrument was certainly widespread and popular, judging by commercial records from Valsesia's jew's harp production. In the 18th and 19th centuries, regular shipments of large quantities of instruments were sent to Bergamo, Brescia, Salò, and other places. Another relevant clue is the presence of the local name for the jew's harp in nearly all Lombard dialectal dictionaries published throughout the 19th century.

Much of the popular repertoire of Bergamo has been preserved by bell ringers, who often wrote tunes, many of which were dances, in booklets. This *Mazurka* for five bells was performed by the bell ringer Giampietro Migliorini from Bergamo, who had learned it from the older Agostino Casari (1901–1979) from Martinengo.

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Biella, V. (a cura di), *Bandalpina. Musiche tradizionali delle Prealpi*, Bergamo, Meridiana, 2007.

Biella, V., *Manuale sull'uso delle “campanine” con un repertorio tratto da musiche tradizionali per campane*, Bergamo, autoproduzione, 2013.

Discography:

Bandalpina, *Sta'n banda*, Meridiana, 1994.

Valzer del Dias

LORENZO D'ERASMO, FEDERICO ROSSIGNOLI: JEW'S HARP

LUCA BOGGIO: BASS JEW'S HARP

VALERIO PAPA: METAL SPOONS

LIONELLO MORANDI: WOODEN CLAPPERS

ALESSANDRO ZOLT: LOW WHISTLE

This waltz, which we found particularly adaptable to the jew's harp, comes from the repertoire of Giovanni “Dias” Zani (1911–1999), an accordionist from Dossena, in the mountains above Bergamo in the Brembana Valley.

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Biella, V. (a cura di), *Bandalpina. Musiche tradizionali delle Prealpi*, Bergamo, Meridiana, 2007.

Scottisc di Cevo

LORENZO D'ERASMO: JEW'S HARP

ALESSANDRO ZOLT: BASS JEW'S HARP

LUCA BOGGIO: MANDOLIN

LIONELLO MORANDI: BĚBENEK

VALERIO PAPA: TAMBURELLO DEI POVERI (WOODEN CLAPPER PLAYED WITH THE TAMBURELLO TECHNIQUE)

This Schottische, another dance from older “liscio”, was collected in Cevo, in the mountains above Brescia in Valcamonica, performed by a small orchestra called the “Squadra dell’Arsura” (with accordion, guitar, banjoline, and clarinet) [from research by Giuliano Grasso and Aurelio Citelli].

Bibliography:

Biella, V. (edited by), *Bandalpina. Musiche tradizionali delle Prealpi*, Bergamo, Meridiana, 2007.

Discography:

Bandalpina, *Sta’n banda*, Meridiana, 1994.

Suite della Svizzera: Ordonnanzmarsch, La Rousse

LORENZO D'ERASMO: WOODEN CLAPPERS (ORDONNANZMARSCH), FRAME DRUM WITHOUT JINGLES, JEW'S HARP (LA ROUSSE)

LIONELLO MORANDI: WOODEN CLAPPERS (ORDONNANZMARSCH), BONE CLAPPERS (LA ROUSSE)

FEDERICO ROSSIGNOLI: JEW'S HARP (LA ROUSSE)

ALESSANDRO ZOLT: BASS JEW'S HARP (LA ROUSSE)

The Ordonnanzmarsch is a marching rhythm performed during ceremonies and parades in the civic musical tradition of the Swiss Confederation. It has become one of the few pieces performed solely by percussion in the tradition of the “*chlefele*”, an instrument made of two carved wooden plates, commonly found in the Canton of Schwyz, and similar to the Tuscan “*gnacchere*”, the Bergamasque “*terlèch*”, the Aosta Valley “*tachenettes*”, and the Irish bones. Traditionally, they are played by children and young people in Schwyz during the Lenten period, from Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday.

Staying within the theme of marches, the following melody comes from the repertoire of fifes and drums from the Val D’Anniviers in the Canton of Valais. These marches are performed during the civic ritual of the *Vignolage*, where villagers work together on neighboring vineyards accompanied by the sound of fifes and drums. These melodies were, however, also known and played on other instruments, as heard in the recording we used as inspiration (made in Vissoie in the late 1970s), where a mouth harmonica plays La Rousse, accompanied by the “*chlefele*”.

Bibliography:

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Bachmann-Geiser, B., *Die Volksmusikinstrumente der Schweiz*, Leipzig, Deutscher Verlag für Musik, 1981.

Discography:

Tritonus, *Alte Volksmusik in der Schweiz*, Zytglogge, 1991.

VV.AA., *Les instruments de musique traditionnels suisses*, Claves Records, 1996.

Suite del Delfinato: Rigodon n. XX, Rigodon de Saint Bonnet, Ta maire a fait un bandit

ALESSANDRO ZOLT: VOICE AND JEW'S HARP

LORENZO D'ERASMO: JEW'S HARP

LUCA BOGGIO: VOICE AND METAL LADLE WITH WOODEN TIPPER

In the mountains of the ancient French region of Dauphiné, an archaic repertoire of dances called *rigodon* is practiced (the term refers to *Rigaudon*, a dance also used in ballets between the 17th and 18th centuries), traditionally performed with the violin. Since the boundary between the valleys of Piedmont and those of France is very fluid, particularly due to the shared Occitan language, it is not surprising that some *rigodon* melodies or some lyrics used to memorize the melody have also been found (associated with other types of local dance) in the Varaita Valley, which has always been linked to the Queyras. Unfortunately, there are few recent traces of the presence of the jew's harp in the French Alps and Provence, but we still wanted to adapt some of these tunes to the instrument because their rhythmic pace and groove seemed particularly compatible.

The first melody, performed solo, comes from a written source: it was collected in the village of Mens and is melody number 20 in the chapter dedicated to the Rigodon in the second volume of *Chants et chansons populaires du Languedoc* (which actually includes songs and dances from a much broader area than present-day Languedoc), compiled by Louis Lambert in 1906. The second comes from a recording made in 1939 in the city of Gap, performed on two violins by two local players (Daniel Jeanselme and Marin Vallet). Finally, the third, for which we also sing the playful text in the local patois used to memorize the melody, comes from the repertoire of fiddler Augustin Istier of St-Laurent-en-Beaumont, recorded in 1977. This text had already been found in Mens with a slightly different melody by Julien Tiersot, a true precursor of French ethnomusicology, and published in his important collection *Chansons populaires recueillies dans les Alpes françaises* (Grenoble, 1903).

Bibliography:

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Lambert, L., *Chants et chansons populaires du Languedoc*, 2 voll., Paris - Leipzig, H. Welter, 1906.
Guilcher, J.-M., *Le domaine du Rigodon. une province originale de la danse*, in "Le Monde alpin et rhodanien. Revue régionale d'ethnologie", n. 1-2, 1984.

Discography:

Rigodon Sauvage, *France: Alpes du Sud-Dauphiné*, Ocora, 1995.
VV.AA., *Le violon traditionnel en France - Enregistrements Historiques 1939-1977*, Silex, 1996.

LYRICS

Ta maire a fa un bandit, moun ami
Ta maire a fa un bandit
Ne faré ben d'aoutre
Perché t'a fa ti, moun ami
Ne faré ben d'aoutre
Perché t'a fa ti

Branle II di Giovanni Antonio Terzi

LORENZO D'ERASMO: JEW'S HARP AND FRAME DRUM WITHOUT JINGLES

FEDERICO ROSSIGNOLI: JEW'S HARP

Giovanni Antonio Terzi (fl. 1580—1600), from Bergamo, was the last of the great lutenists of the Renaissance. His music, collected in two volumes of tablature (1593 and 1599), is among the highest, richest, and most complex examples of lute art, and represents a true compendium of the musical landscape of the time. This landscape included various types of dances such as *gagliarde*, *balli alemanni*, *passè mezzì*, *pavane*, *volte*, and *correnti francesi* (the first examples of which appear in Italy in Terzi's second book) and *branle*, all elegantly ornamented and diminished. We chose the *Branle II* as a worthy representative of the popular taste that was influencing cultured composers across Europe at the time.

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Pastorella di Moritz von Hessen-Kassel

LUCA BOGGIO: JEW'S HARP

FEDERICO ROSSIGNOLI: JEW'S HARP

LORENZO D'ERASMO: TAMBURELLO (ITALIAN FRAME DRUM WITH JINGLES)

Moritz von Hessen-Kassel (1572—1632) was the landgrave of the German county of Hessen-Kassel. He gave exceptional support to music, being a patron to great musicians of the time, such as Schütz, Hassler, Dowland, and Orologio. He was not only a patron of music but also of various fields of art and knowledge, earning the title of “Moritz the scholar”.

He himself was a composer and musician, writing both sacred and secular music, vocal and instrumental. His music follows the taste and style of the time without any particularly innovative upheavals and embraces various genres, such as madrigals, motets, villanelles, and dances, the latter written without specific instrumentation instructions and in some ways influenced by the style of English consorts. An example of his instrumental works is our *Pastorella*, which, judging by its name, can be associated with the same artistic temper interested in the popular world as Terzi's *Branle* described above.

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Discography:

La Pifarescha, *Di guerra e di pace. Renaissance Music for Winds and Percussion*, Glossa, 2016.

Girometta (“Sentirete una canzonetta” di Tarquinio Merula)

ALESSANDRO ZOLT: JEW’S HARP

LUCA BOGGIO: BASS JEW’S HARP

FEDERICO ROSSIGNOLI: BAGLAMÀS

LIONELLO MORANDI: WOODEN CLAPPERS

LORENZO D’ERASMO: FRAME DRUM WITHOUT JINGLES

Tarquinio Merula (1594—1665), from Cremona, was one of the most innovative composers of his time, both in instrumental and vocal music. He was an organist and chapel master and held these positions in various locations, such as Cremona, Bergamo, and the Kingdom of Poland.

As a representative of the 17th-century monody revolution, Merula cultivated the “Venetian style” of authors like Berti and Grandi, advancing and innovating it. Around 1630, he composed many songs with an ostinato bass, dances, variations on popular themes, and chamber sonatas. It is during this period that works like *Curtio precipitato et altri capricii, libro secondo* (Venice, 1638) were born, from which the aria *Sentirete una canzonetta* is taken, an arrangement of the famous popular song *La Girometta*.

To speak of *La Girometta*, its popular origins, and its continuous intersections with cultured music would perhaps require an entire monograph. For now, we will refer to the thorough but outdated essay by Balilla Pratella (in the bibliography) and provide a few general details: it has been reported by several authors since the mid-16th century as a very popular song (and melody), so much so that it could be heard in every village, street, and square. Various authors transcribed the melody, but especially, following its success, they made variations and fantasies on it. After numerous cultured attestations between the 16th and late 17th centuries, *La Girometta* returned to prominence in the 19th century when folklorists began their first research into European folk repertoires. It was then discovered that it had remained both as a folk song (Constantino Nigra collected it in Canavese and included it as number 106 in his famous work *Canti popolari del Piemonte*, 1888) and as a dance (Giuseppe Ungarelli found it in the fiddle repertoire of the Bolognese countryside and described and transcribed it in *Le vecchie danze italiane ancora in uso nella provincia bolognese*, 1894). In even more recent times, *La Girometta* was rediscovered in ethnomusicological field recordings made in Italy starting in the 1950s. To give just two examples from the Piedmont region, the song was recorded in 1958 in Ceresito Donato, between Biellese and Eporediese, and in 1961 in Talosio Ribordone in the upper Orco Valley. Furthermore, this melody is still used on the bells of many rural or mountain churches between Piedmont and Lombardy.

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Pratella, F. B., *La Girometta (continuas. e fine)*, Vol. 9, n. 2, 1938.

Bonta, S., *Merula, Tarquinio*, in Sadie, S., Tyrrell, J. (a cura di), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Discography:

Ensemble “L’Aura Soave”, *Curtio precipitato*, Tactus, 1999.

A short note on the instruments used in this album

The instruments used in the recording have various geographical, constructive, and organological features.

Especially in the case of the jew's harp, variations in form and aesthetics, although rarely affecting the sound, can be significantly marked depending on the area (and today, in a context less tied to tradition, depending on the creativity of the individual maker): in Europe, traditionally the largest examples in terms of size are undoubtedly those from Southern Italy and Sicily (for example, a *marranzanu* from the late maker Giacomo Tremoglie measures 10 cm in length x 7.5 cm in width), while among the smallest are models made in the Carpathians of Ukraine (for example, a *drymba* from the late maker Ivan Vandzhurak measures 4.5 cm in length x 4 cm in width). Industrial or large-scale handcrafted models, such as those made in Austria or formerly in the British Isles, were marketed (perhaps more for marketing purposes than musical needs) in different sizes. The model built in Valsesia (and today excellently reconstructed by Luca Boggio), although produced in large quantities, remained small with rather constant measures (an average of 5.5 cm in length x 3 cm in width). The instruments used in our recordings, even when not philological reconstructions of ancient instruments, are roughly based on the Valsesian model or a generic and hypothetical "continental-European" model for both size and sound. As already specified in the introductory text, we also used larger instruments (and/or appropriately tuned with beeswax) tuned to the lower octave, which are more the result of today's jew's harp makers' creativity (and the taste of today's players).

The nomenclature of the jew's harp is a very complex topic that cannot be addressed in these few lines, but it is enough to know that the instrument has an impressive number of variants and subvariants in almost every language and dialect of Europe (and the world...), terms often no longer in common use today or with a meaning that has changed due to the disappearance of the instrument. As for the name "scacciapensieri", which is now the standard name in Tuscan Italian, it appears, along with some variants ("spassapensieri", "cacapensieri", etc.), in scholarly/academic contexts at the beginning of the 16th century.

Below is a brief (not exhaustive, but representative) list of names for the jew's harp in the local languages of the areas represented in our album:

Aosta Valley: *trompo* (Walser language of Gressoney), *tsamporgne* (Francoprovençal patois of Aosta Valley).

Piedmont: *ribebba* / *ribeba* / *arbebola* (Piedmontese from Valsesia), *trumpa* (Walser language of Alagna Valsesia), *arbebo* / *aribebo* (Occitan language from the Occitan valleys), *sanfornna* (Piedmontese from Monferrato), *ciamporgna* (Piedmontese).

Lombardy: *rebeba* (Lombard from Bergamo and Brescia), *cinforogna* (Lombard from Como), *zanforogna* (Lombard).

France (Provence): *fanfornia* (Occitan patois from Nice), *champorgna* (Occitan patois from Barcelonnette), *guitarro* / *citaro* (Occitan Provençal patois).

Switzerland: *sinforogna* (Romansch language of Grisons), *rbaîrbe* (Francoprovençal patois from Canton Jura), *trümpi* (Swiss German from Canton Schwyz).

The campanine are an instrument of Bergamasque origin, used by every bell-ringer to study and memorize the pieces to be performed later on the bell tower keyboard. The particular technique used to play melodies after studying on the campanine is called "suonare d'allegrezza": it involves playing the melodies directly from the top of the bell tower, using a keyboard where each key is connected to a single bell. The instrument appears as a xylophone with a glass keyboard (as in this recording), with resonators arranged in a major scale; in more recent models, brass or aluminum is used instead of the traditional glass.

The percussion instruments used include both membranophones and idiophones. Among the former, various types of frame drums with natural skin were played. "Tamburo muto" (frame drum without jingles) and "tamburello" (frame drum with jingles) refer respectively to a very simple instrument without jingles and a tambourine with jingles in the Sicilian Messina style,

used by us for early music pieces. In some tracks, to achieve a more pronounced attack and add more colour to the sound, we preferred a drum with jingles and external tensioning rings, played with a wooden mallet. This type is currently widespread in Eastern Europe with various names, such as “bębenek” (Poland), “bubon” (Ukraine), “bubyns” (Latvia), and “buben” (Russia and Belarus). This playing style appears to have precedents in other European areas. In a traditional piece from Cogne, this instrument, structurally not too dissimilar from the tambour of Cogne, was played by hand in accordance with local technique, which produces very characteristic sounds.

As for idiophones, we mainly used flat clappers made from two elongated wooden plates or two animal ribs. This is an instrument once widely used in various local traditions, and it can have specific names and slightly different forms depending on the region. The types played in this album are called “gnacchere” in Tuscany, “terlèch” in Bergamasque, “tachenettes” in Aosta Valley and Savoy, and “chlefele” in German-speaking Switzerland. The clappers were sometimes paired with metal or wooden spoons, another idiophone found in various folk traditions, alongside the ladle with tipper, while in one case, we opted for the “tamburello dei poveri” (“poor man’s tambourine”), a pair of wooden tablets connected by a string of uncertain origin, played similarly to the tamburello used in Salento (Apulia).

Aerophones (flutes) and chordophones (long-necked plucked lutes) briefly appear in the recordings, both types of instruments found in northern Italian traditions. For the aerophones, we can mention the flutes and whistles made in the Imagna Valley or the recorders used by the piffero players of the Quattro Province for melody-learning purposes. Regarding plucked chordophones, it is worth mentioning the presence of a historical local lute-making tradition in Bagolino, in the Caffaro Valley, which provided instruments (chitarra battente and mandolins) for the players of the famous Carnival. Although a more recent and “urban-artisanal” phenomenon, between the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mandolin ensembles were established throughout northern Italy, and the mandolin itself became a very popular instrument, even in rural or mountain areas, as often evidenced by period photographs.

Makers of the instruments used: Luca Boggio, Bernard Lalanne-Cassou, Martin Oberta, Priit Moppel, Alexander Dernovoi, Yevhen Svatovsky, Andreas Schlütter, Edilio Vacca (jew’s harp), unknown luthier - Milanese school (mandolin), unknown luthier - Athenian school (baglamàs), James D. Becker (low whistle), Valter Biella (campanine), Majid Karami (frame drum without jingles), Gianluca Carta (tamburello), Katarzyna Zedel (bębenek), Lionello Morandi (gnacchere), Röbi Kessler (chlefele and wooden spoons), Guido Antoniotti (terlèch and tachenettes), Valerio Papa (tamburello dei poveri).

The tracks were recorded on September 14 and 15, 2024, in Cene (Bergamo), at the studio of Jacopo Biffi.

The mastering was done between January and February 2025 by Fabio Giannotti.

The booklet was written and compiled by Alessandro Zolt, Federico Rossignoli, Lionello Morandi, and Lorenzo D’Erasmus.

The graphics were designed by Pelin İğdebeli.

Printing and online distribution are handled by SimulArte.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to Jacopo Biffi, Fabio Giannotti, and Pelin İğdebeli for making this album physically, soundwise, and visually possible. A special thanks to Fabio Tricomi and the Italian community of jew’s harp players, keepers of a valuable musical tradition and active participants. Thanks to Valter Biella for sharing his valuable research and for creating the Bergamasque campanine, to Luca Boggio, and to all the jew’s harp makers who will continue to bring new life to this instrument.